



## *Lessons Learned from the Blueprints for Violence Prevention Replication of the Life Skills Training Program*

There has been much success in the last decade in identifying and diffusing effective research-based delinquency and crime prevention programs. However, there is still much to be learned about the common problems faced when implementing in “real” settings, outside the rigorous controls of research trials.

Blueprints staff have examined and documented many of these problems by conducting a process evaluation of the Life Skills Training (LST) school-based drug prevention program. The evaluation was conducted by the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSPV), under the Blueprints for Violence Prevention Initiative, in conjunction with the designer of the LST program, Dr. Gilbert Botvin, and his dissemination agency, National Health Promotion Associates (NHPA), and was funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP).

The primary goal of the process evaluation was aimed at a) ensuring that schools taught LST in its entirety and with a high level of fidelity to the core components of the program; b) identifying the problems encountered during replication; and c) working with schools to implement solutions to these problems. The sample in the study included 70 sites, comprising 292 schools and approximately 130,000 students receiving the three-year curriculum<sup>1</sup>. The sites varied in size, with some containing only one school, and others containing multiple schools in multiple districts. Schools were located in urban, suburban, and rural areas and served students of varying socioeconomic status and racial/ethnic backgrounds.

Despite the success and positive feedback received from the overall evaluation, the 70 sites encountered a range of obstacles, to varying degrees, during replication. The initiative was aimed at identifying such barriers and generating solutions to them, and CSPV believes this work improved implementation fidelity in the project. One key factor effecting the success of implementation

was the support and enthusiasm of key participants. Initial and sustained commitment was needed on multiple levels, including site coordinators, school administrators, and LST instructors. CSPV hoped to ensure this through on-site feasibility visits prior to site selection, which allowed participants to discuss their concerns, identify potential replication problems, and brainstorm ways to avoid them. The discussions usually fostered a common sense of obligation to meet project requirements, and were important in bolstering support from teachers, who are often left out of the decision-making processes.

The evaluation also indicates that sites with high levels of commitment from the onset were generally those with a program “champion,” particularly when champions also acted as on-site coordinators. Sites with strong local coordinators generally experienced few problems during implementation, even in large sites requiring much management, and achieved higher implementation scores. In general, effective site coordinators devoted much time to the project and had a natural interest in it.




Although principal support was less important in achieving high implementation scores among teachers in this initiative than other projects (possibly due to the role that CSPV and the local coordinators played), a lack of principal support contributed to all three of the sites that failed to complete their participation in the project. Thus, principal and administrative support is crucial to sustain a program.

Although CSPV anticipated that program success would depend upon support from LST instructors, the measure of teacher commitment was uncorrelated with implementation scores. It is possible that some teachers effectively delivered the curriculum even when not supportive. Lack of teacher support did effect student response, with strong associations between teachers’ overall rating of the program and student behavior problems and boredom.

The effectiveness of the teacher-training workshop also impacted the success of implementation. Absences from training and teacher turnover after training were problematic and often slowed implementation. CSPV combated this by encouraging sites to schedule training for times that would best ensure full attendance, and urging sites to send additional staff to training, who could act as replacement teachers if turnover occurred. However, at times, a second training had to be scheduled.

**“The results indicate that teachers delivered the majority of the lessons, in a manner consistent with the goals of the program, and with generally high levels of support from key participants.”**

### Highlights:

-  **Lessons Learned**
-  **Grants 1 & 2 Training of**
-  **Coordinator Conference Set**
-  **Teacher Feedback Form Available**



**Lessons...**(continued from page 1...)

The most common obstacle in integrating LST into current school systems was that teachers and administrators did not want to take time away from "core" academic subjects. Successful sites were able to implement LST into subjects that already covered similar information, such as Health, while several sites matched the LST program with their curriculum requirements and usually found that the program fulfilled many goals. This typically increased support for the program from both teachers and administrators.

Teacher effectiveness in delivering the lessons and adhering to the program curriculum was also important for implementation success. Successful teachers utilized more interactive techniques, such as role playing, demonstration, and behavior rehearsal, which were more conducive to implementation success than strictly lecturing. In part, lecturing was associated with student boredom, worse student behavior, and less student participation in lessons.

This large-scale replication found that after two years of program implementation, sites demonstrated high rates of implementation success, with implementation scores averaging from 81-86% across the groups of schools, time periods, and levels of implementation. The results indicate that teachers delivered the majority of the lessons, in a manner consistent with the goals of the program, and with generally high levels of support from key participants.

Recommendations for strengthening participant support include: using on-site feasibility visits to create group obligation to fulfill goals and encourage collaborative decision-making; meeting with administrators, local coordinators, and instructors during implementation to discuss the program and any problems that have arisen; and using yearly site reports to applaud progress and recommend strategies for enhancing teacher enthusiasm, such as including instructors in decision-making, holding regular feedback meetings, and encouraging instructors to utilize technical support. Faced with increasing pressure to adopt research-based programs, as well as a growing list of successful programs from which to choose, communities are now facing the tough question of how to mount successful replications in "real" settings, and CSPV is hopeful that these findings can help guide such decisions.

Abstracted From:

Fagan, Abigail A., & Mihalic, Sharon (in press). Strategies for enhancing the adoption of school-based prevention programs: Lessons learned from the Blueprints for Violence Prevention replications of the Life Skills Training program. *Journal of Community Psychology*.

<sup>1</sup> Grant One and Two schools were included in this analysis. Grant One schools had implemented LST for two years and Grant Two schools for one year. Grant Three schools were not included since they had not completed a full year of implementation.

CSPV & NHPA  
announce a grant-funded  
Training of Trainers, scheduled  
for June 5-7, 2003 in  
Breckenridge, Colorado.  
Grant 1 & 2  
participants were  
selected based on  
their sites' commitment  
to continued success of  
the LST program.

**CSPV & NHPA  
are happy to announce  
a grant-funded  
Coordinator Conference,  
scheduled for  
September 19, 2003 in  
Boulder, Colorado.  
Coordinators from all 3  
OJJDP grants have been  
invited to learn more about  
the success of LST, and to  
discuss relevant  
implementation topics  
(supplementing lessons,  
identifying funding, adapt-  
ing LST to fit student**

**On-Line Teacher Feedback Form Now Avail-**

Teachers can now complete the Teacher Feedback Form via the CSPV web site. The form is invaluable in our nation-wide study of the overall assessment of the LST program, and the on-line form was designed to make it easier and faster for teachers to provide their feedback of this years implementation.

The form can be found at:  
<http://ibs.colorado.edu/cspv/lstfeedback>

\*Teachers must be aware of what "site" & "grant #" they participate in to complete the on-line form.

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